

Did Politics Fuel Arson at Palin's Church?

After

a fire was set at Wasilla Bible Church last Friday night, a conservative leader alleged the church may have been targeted for its support of traditional marriage.



[] The hometown church of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was set on fire last Friday night, rousing the former vice presidential nominee from bed and prompting her to tell church leaders she's sorry if her high visibility in any way caused the incident.

"If there's anything that I've done to draw negative attention to that good church, I certainly apologize for it," Palin later told Greta Van Susteren of FOX News, after reports of the fire made national headlines.

One Washington-based conservative is calling on officials to conduct a thorough investigation that does not rule out gay rights extremism as a motivating factor.

"We do not know if this arson and attempted murder was perpetrated by advocates of homosexual marriage, but the church has been the target of verbal attacks by the homosexual lobby and their apologists in the major media," said Eugene Delgaudio, president of the traditional family advocacy group Public Advocate of the United States. He also alluded to recent outbreaks of anti-Christian violence by gay rights activists in California and elsewhere.

Palin is featured in a cover story in the January 2009 issue of *Charisma*. "The Faith of Sarah Palin" looks at the governor's Pentecostal roots and how she broke the gender barrier during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Federal investigators said Monday that an ignitable accelerant was poured on and around the exterior of the church in multiple locations, including the entrances and exits. Though the front entry area and offices were badly damaged, the sanctaury was left mostly intact.

A handful of women and children scrapbooking inside the church escaped uninjured from the blaze, which caused an estimated \$1 million in structural damage.

Wasilla Bible Church, which is led by pastor Larry Kroon, issued a statement on its Web site directing church members to relocate to Wasilla Middle School for services on Sunday. Church leaders remained upbeat in the midst of the tragedy. "Praise God that no one in the building was injured," church leaders said in a statement. "Pray for us as we rebuild."

Douglas Dawson, special agent in charge at the Seattle Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), reported that on Saturday, the day after the highly publicized fire, the Wasilla fire department and state fire marshals called the ATF office in Anchorage, about 40 miles south of Wasilla, requesting federal assistance.

"ATF will continue to work diligently alongside our local partners and will make every effort to find the person or persons responsible for this fire," Dawson said.

Special Agent Nick Starcevic of the ATF Seattle office confirmed on Monday the arson investigation is ongoing and said he could not provide any other information at this time.

Because Gov. Palin lives so close to the church and is also its most famous member, the blaze at Wasilla Bible Church drew immediate media coverage. Palin's openness about her Christian faith and her conservative position on same-sex marriage also garnered national headlines as potential motives in the arson case.

Alaska prayer leader Mary Glazier of Windwalkers International

said most of the intercessors who regularly pray for Palin believe the fire was politically motivated.

“There is a consensus with the prayer group, particularly out in Wasilla, that this is most likely politically motivated,” Glazier said. “We’re mobilizing prayer not only around Sarah Palin but around the administration. There has been an onslaught against her, just lawsuit after lawsuit after lawsuit being filed against her. I think they’re trying to discourage her from running for future office.”

Glazier added that intercessors are praying for Wasilla Bible Church’s rebuilding efforts and “for other churches, that the same thing doesn’t happen to them.”

If it turns out a hatred for Gov. Palin motivated the church arson, it could help explain an unsolicited apology she offered church leaders over the weekend. In a FOX News interview Monday night, Palin said her affiliation with Wasilla Bible Church and her past visits to other Alaskan churches caused them to receive “unfair scrutiny and negative press” during the run-up to the 2008 presidential election.

Palin and her family were roused from sleep around 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, several hours after the fire was allegedly lit. Despite the devastating blaze, Palin told FOX that she believes “what was meant for evil will be turned around for good.” **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**

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